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ACTION EA-20

INFO OCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-08 L-04 NSAE-00
NSC-10 P-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-20 USIA-12 UPW-01 IO-16
RSR-01 /105 W
022733:

R 031150Z JUN 71
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5620
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL DANANG
USDEL FRANCE
AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAIGON 8689

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

SUBJ: RETIRED GENERALS POSTPONE ENDORSEMENT OF BIG MINH

REF: A. SAIGON 8527; B. SAIGON 8171; C. SAIGON 8341; D. SAIGON 5757

1. SUMMARY AND COMMENTS: MAY 29 GENERAL MINH REPORTEDLY TOLD A MEETING OF RETIRED GENERALS THAT HE HAS NOW DECIDED TO BE A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BUT FAILED TO OBTAIN THEIR UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT FOR A DECLARATION OF SUPPORT AT THIS TIME (REF. A). THE GROUP SUBSEQUENTLY DECIDED (IN MINH'S ABSENCE) TO POSTPONE PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT UNTIL AT LEAST AFTER MINH ANNOUNCES HIS CANDIDACY PUBLICLY.

2. THE PRIMARY CATALYST FOR THE MEETINGS APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MINH'S DESIRE TO COUNTER THE EFFECT OF TRAV VAN DON'S MAY 22 STATEMENT OF NEUTRALITY (REF. B) AND A SIMILAR STATEMENT BY AN QUANG LEADER THICH TRI QUANG ON MAY 25 (REF. C). PREMATURE TIMING, FEARS OF POSSIBLE HARASSMENT, AND A LINGERING DISSATISFACTION WITH MINH'S VAGUENESS PROBABLY ACCOUNT FOR THE GENERALS' DECISION. ALTHOUGH THE DELAY

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Steven Igelberg DATE 1/26/82
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKING: ☐
DECLASSIFIED☑ RELEASABLE☑
RELEASE EXCISE☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

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REPRESENTS ANOTHER SMALL SETBACK FOR MINH, HE PROBABLY WILL OBTAIN THE GENERALS' EVENTUAL SUPPORT AND HIS CAMPAIGN MAY IN FACT BENEFIT IN THE EVENT MINH ACTS ON THEIR ADVICE, TIGHTENS UP HIS ORGANIZATION AND CLARIFIES HIS POSITIONS. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

3. RETIRED GENERALS TRAN VAN DON, TON THAT DINH, AND DO MAU HAVE SEPARATELY CONFIRMED TO EMBOFFS THAT GENERAL MINH CALLED MEETING OF 26 RETIRED GENERALS AND COLONELS MAY 29 TO OBTAIN THEIR SUPPORT FOR HIS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY. ALL SOURCES WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE MEETING STATED THAT THE GENERALS FIRST PRESSED MINH TO CLARIFY HIS POSITIONS AND URGED HIM TO TIGHTEN UP HIS CAMPAIGN BUT THAT IN THE END THEY FAILED TO REACH AGREEMENT ON A PUBLIC ENDORSEMENT AT THIS TIME.

5. ACCORDING TO GENERAL DINH, THE GROUP REASSEMBLED WITHOUT MINH ON JUNE 2 AT DON'S RESIDENCE AND FORMALLY DECIDED TO POSTPONE ANY DECLARATION OF SUPPORT AT LEAST UNTIL MINH ANNOUNCES HIS CANDIDACY IN PUBLIC.

6. GENERAL DINH, A STRONG MINH SUPPORTER, STATED THAT DURING THE MAY 29 MEETING MINH HAD ANNOUNCED HIS DECISION TO RUN AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND THAT ALL EXCEPT TRAN VAN DON HAD AGREED TO SUPPORT HIM. DINH ADDED THAT THE GENERALS AGREED TO DELAY THEIR ANNOUNCEMENT FOR FEAR THAT THE MOVE WOULD BE PREMATURE AND MIGHT EXPOSE THEM TO OFFICIAL HARASSMENT. HE NOTED THAT TRAN VAN DON HAD STOOD BY HIS DECLARATION OF "NEUTRALITY" BUT DON HAD DESCRIBED THIS POSITION AS A "POLITICAL TACTIC" WHICH HE PROMISED TO "RECONSIDER" AT A LATER DATE.

7. IN CONTRAST, DON INDICATED TO US THAT AT LEAST SOME GENERALS WERE HESITATING TO COMMIT THEMSELVES TO MINH BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT ENTIRELY SATISFIED WITH HIS POSITIONS AND CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION. HOWEVER, DON SAID THAT IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONING BY THE GENERALS MINH REJECTED ANY POSSIBILITY OF A COALITION OR OF A POLICY OF NEUTRAILITY AND REITERATED HIS FORMULA OF A PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE WITH NORTH VIET NAM" (REF. D).

8. RETIRED GENERAL DO MAU, FORMER MSS CHIEF, TOLD

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EMBOFFS THAT A HEATED DEBATE ENSUED AMONG THE GENERALS DURING THEIR FIRST SESSION BUT THAT ON JUNE 2 ALL BUT GENERALS DON AND LAM VAN PHAT AFFIRMED THEIR SUPPORT FOR MINH WHEN INDIVIDUALLY POLLED BY GENERAL DON. MAU IS CONVINCED THAT MINH NOW HAS DECIDED TO BE A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND STATED THAT THE RETIRED GENERALS WILL ISSUE THEIR ENDORSEMENT FOLLOWING MINH'S OWN DECLARATION.
BUNKER